

Manifestos, an introduction

University Liberation Front

"Let it be known: The UC system is an apparatus that shapes students and their thoughts within machinery that is patriarchal, homophobic, racially exclusionary, and classist." These words were written in March 2010 in response to the UC San Diego administration's weak and complacent reaction to the mass mobilization of students and faculty of color fighting against the toxic racial climate at our campus. Against the backdrop of nation-wide student mobilizations against tuition increases, austerity measures and the privatization of the public university, many of us recognized the relationship between social injustice and the privatized university. And we were by no means alone in this; in cities across California, protests against the privatization of the UC took place alongside protests against other cuts in public funding and social services, creating networked movements rooted in community organizing and a broader understanding of the interconnected nature of oppression. Both within and without California, allies fought interconnected battles in the prison abolition movement, the Divest Israel movement, the battle for ethnic studies in Arizona, and student occupations in Puerto Rico, among others.

As we fought alongside our students, professors and neighbors in these movements, we began to confront our complicity in an educational apparatus that advanced the needs of corporations rather than the needs of the communities we were fighting for. Realizing that the university depends upon our labor as teaching assistants, graders and low-level instructors, we began to wonder what would happen if we adopted a practice of strategic betrayal to reclaim spaces in the university for critical education. We found places in our assigned curriculum to bring in Banksy, George Winne, Jr., and Tupac. Rather than pushing our students towards superficial, standardized symbols of achievement—the formulaic essay, the A, the degree—we searched for opportunities to provide our students with the analytic tools to understand how the world spins and how they could change the spin of the world.

In 2011 and 2012, the mass mobilizations against neoliberal and neocolonial formations of power provided us with new lenses for thinking about the roles and responsibilities of the university. We nodded along to YouTube videos of our favorite activist-scholars addressing crowds of protestors as their words seemingly demonstrated the relevance and subversive potential of certain forms of academic critique. But still we wondered what it would look like if scholars brought these movements back into their classrooms not as illustrative examples but as organizing principles. What would it look like if we occupied and reclaimed our own classrooms and spaces of learning? How could a pedagogy of the 99% challenge the underlying logics of the neoliberal university? What would happen if we placed the experiences, struggles and desires of our communities — communities of color, and working class, queer and transgender communities—at the center of the classroom? Hoping to prompt people to rethink the relationship between the university and community struggles, we drafted *Pedagogy for Our Future* in the fall of 2011. Informed

by our experiences in smaller-scale struggles against privatization, police brutality, labor exploitation and racism and inspired by the scope and tone of larger mass mobilizations, we sought to articulate a set of practices capable of opening up spaces of possibility within the neoliberal university.

Far from comprehensive, *Pedagogy for Our Future* was meant to be added to, adapted and revised by activist-educators (broadly defined) according to the needs and philosophies of their local struggles. Because the manifesto was written to spark a dialogue rather than advance a particular program, we have chosen to present it here as part of a dossier of interrelated documents produced by youth-oriented communities struggling against global systems of exploitation and oppression. Whether produced in the barricades of Río Piedras or the reclaimed streets of Cairo, these calls to action and understanding critique intersecting systems of exploitation and gesture to points of solidarity and coalition-formation. In doing so, they open up spaces for imagining new futures and they create the conditions in which such a future may indeed come to pass.

The dossier begins with a pair of documents: the official statement approved by Occupy Wall Street's General Assembly on September 29, 2011, and the letter of solidarity sent from comrades in Cairo one month later, on October 24, 2011. By enumerating a lengthy list of specific grievances, the Occupy Wall Street declaration defines a collective "we" in opposition to a corrupt "they." Thus, the movement becomes a battle of "us" against "them" rather than against the underlying systems of exploitation and oppression. Read as a response to the Occupy statement, the letter from Cairo makes an instructive intervention into this discourse by repositioning the movement as a node in a larger, global movement against transnational capitalism and its neocolonizing effects. Drawing upon their own experiences reclaiming and rebuilding their nation, the Cairo authors counsel the Occupy movement to abandon their fixation on abstract concepts like "true democracy" and to focus instead on reclaiming public spaces and creating concrete alternatives to the status quo.

Written over a year before the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, *Ocúp(arte): The Humanities Manifesto* emerged from the student protest movement at University of Puerto Rico. Against the backdrop of nation-wide student protests against tuition increases and budget cuts, students in the Faculty of the Humanities and the Faculty of the Social Sciences at the Río Piedras campus announced their intention to occupy both faculties in response to the continuing privatization of the public university. Rejecting what it calls the "fiscal fetish shared by the State and the university's administration," the manifesto reimagines education as a collective, creative enterprise, an opportunity to create an inclusive community capable of resisting the competitive individualism characteristic of capitalist society. By taking up the fight for the humanities as a means of challenging oppressive formations of economic, social and political power, the manifesto invokes imagination, plurality and inclusion as central tools of liberation.

Whereas *Ocúp(arte)* is primarily devoted to imagining an alternative to traditional educational models, *We Are Many Youth, But With One Struggle* attempts to redefine the relationship between student-led struggles for educational justice and broader struggles for social justice. Sometimes referred to as the Manifesto of International Student Struggle because of its transnational origin, the document was approved at an international meeting called jointly by CSP-Conlutas (a Brazilian central trade union trying to organize labor unions, popular movements, and the youth in one unified struggle) and the Union Sindical Solidaire (a French association of federations and national unions) on May 2-3, 2012. Though initially signed by representatives from eight nations, the manifesto has since been adopted by student organizations across the world. Linking multiple struggles into a portrait of a powerful, planetary youth movement, the document advocates a May '68-style student-worker solidarity and places the university at the center of a global fight for justice. Far from a city on a hill, the university is thus taken up as a central battlefield for combating larger systems of exploitation and oppression.

And so we fight for a liberatory education. As the Cairo authors advise in their closing paragraph: "Occupy more, find each other, build larger and larger networks and keep discovering new ways to experiment with social life, consensus and democracy." In different ways, the documents collected in this dossier attempt to do just that: to make connections with other movements, to imagine new learning communities, and to carve out spaces of possibility and transformation.